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ABSTRACT

This paper considers changing practice in literacy teaching from a traditionally individualized approach where great emphasis was placed on adult child interaction to a more teacher-directed program. September 1998 saw the introduction of a National Literacy Strategy in England. For the first time the national government prescribed not only what was to be taught in literacy but how it was to be taught to all children ages 5 to 11. The Strategy provides a framework of pre-specified objectives for each semester's teaching in text, sentence, and word level work which is delivered via a structured hour-long session: the literacy hour. This calls for explicit teaching throughout, and involves whole class shared reading and writing (15 minutes); whole class structured grammar and phonics work (15 minutes); 20 minutes during which one or two groups work on guided reading or writing with the teacher while the rest of the class works independently; and a 10-minute whole class plenary. Initial test results show improvement in standards of literacy. The paper draws on data from case studies of teachers in the first 2 years of implementation of the literacy strategy and considers how the structure and management of lessons have changed but some teachers' interactions with children have changed little over this time. The study was conducted with 10 predominantly rural schools; data were collected in teacher interviews, standardized test results, classroom observations, work samples, planning documents, and a follow-up study. Contains 2 tables of data and 13 references. (NKA)

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Changing Teacher Practice: A Report of Changes in the Practice of Teachers in England Following the Introduction of a National Literacy Strategy.

by Ros Fisher

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Changing Teacher Practice

A report of changes in the practice of teachers in England following the introduction of a national literacy strategy.

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Introduction

This paper considers changing practice in literacy teaching from a traditionally individualised approach where great emphasis was placed on adult child interaction to a more teacher directed programme. September 1998 saw the introduction of a National Literacy Strategy in England. For the first time national government prescribed not only what was to be taught in literacy but how it was to be taught to all children from age five to eleven.

Soon after the 1997 election, the newly elected Labour Government in the United Kingdom set the target that 80% of 11 year olds should reach the standard expected in English for their age in the National tests by 2002. In order to reach these 'ambitious targets' a National Literacy Strategy (NLS) was introduced. Although not statutory, considerable pressure has been placed on schools to implement this programme, and most English primary (age 4-11 years) schools have adopted it from September 1998. The Strategy provides a framework of pre-specified objectives for each semester's teaching in text, sentence and word level work which is delivered via a structured hour long session: the literacy hour. This involves shared reading and writing with the whole class (15 minutes); structured grammar and phonic work with the whole class (15 minutes); 20 minutes during which one or two groups work on guided reading or writing with the teacher and the rest of the class work independently; and a ten minute plenary with the whole class. It involves explicit teaching throughout, in contrast to much of the previous practice in British primary schools where the teaching of literacy has been largely individualised. This is supported by a training package of distance learning materials.

A typical literacy hour involves a fifteen-minute whole class session where the teacher reads a book, or extract from a book, from an enlarged text. Children follow the text while the teacher reads and she draws attention to particular features as specified in the text level section of the Framework of objectives (DfEE 1998). The aspects of text selected are taken from the list of objectives given in the framework of objectives for that year group in that semester, for example, *to identify the point of view from which a story is told and how this affects the reader's response* (DfEE, 1998 Year 5, Term 3 Text 2). Alternatively the teacher may model some aspect of text construction in a shared writing activity. In the second fifteen minutes of the whole class time the teacher works with the pupils on word (phonics, spelling or vocabulary) or sentence (grammar and punctuation) objectives again as given in the framework: for example, *to search for, identify and classify a range of prepositions: back, up, down, across, through, on etc.; experiment with substituting different prepositions and their effect on meaning. Understand and use the term preposition* (DfEE, 1998 Year 5, Term 3 Sentence 3). Usually, although not always, these aspects of literacy are taken from the text used in the first part of the hour. The twenty minutes that follow are spent by the teacher working with a group or groups of children on a specific aspect of literacy in a differentiated group of six to eight children. They may be either working on an aspect of written composition or reading from group sets of a text. Meanwhile the rest of the class work independently: practising skills covered earlier; on investigations into literacy; or their own reading or writing. The whole class comes together at the end of the hour for about ten minutes to review what they have learned. All pupils are expected to be taught in the literacy hour regardless of ability and it is only in the guided and independent work (20 minutes) that teaching is differentiated (see Table 1).

Initial test results show improvement in standards of literacy (Sainsbury et al, 1998; Ofsted, 1999), however, evidence reported here indicates that, whereas teachers are able to change the format and structure of their literacy lessons, not all are able to change the underlying patterns of interaction with children.

Table 1: Break down of a literacy hour

Pupils	No. of minut taught	Whole whole text	c Whole word/ sentence	c Guided rea or writing	Independent work	Whole plenary	c
4-7 years Key Stage	60 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes	2 X 10 minu	20 minutes	10 minutes	
7-11 years Key Stage 2	60 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes	20 minutes	20 minutes	10 minutes	

Perceived problems with existing practice

The literacy hour was introduced in order to bring about a number of changes to the teaching of literacy which, up to this time, had been based largely on a model of individualised teaching. The NLS introduced a major change in classroom organisation and management. This has resulted in an increase in the amount of time children are taught as whole class groups and a concomitant increase in the amount of time the teacher spends teaching, as opposed to interacting with individuals in response to their perceived needs of the moment.

Research studies in the 1980s in UK had studied classroom organisation at elementary level and criticised teachers for operating what was described as 'crisis management' (Bennett et al 1984). This led to a call for less individualisation and for teachers to become better managers of learning. Unfortunately, changing teaching style is not as straightforward as the introduction of new procedures. Whole class teaching can be done effectively as well as ineffectively. The NLS is based on a Vygotskian model with pupils moving from dependence on the adult (shared work), to interdependence (guided work) to independent working. Without understanding of this key principle, the hour can easily become a series of short, decontextualised periods of instruction. Equally, it can be argued that the key to successful teaching lies not in the programme but in the interaction between pupil and teacher.

Research

This paper draws on data from the case studies of teachers in the first two years of implementation of the literacy strategy and considers how the structure and management of lessons have changed but that some teachers' interactions with children have changed little over this time. Many teachers have moved from largely individualised literacy teaching to using more shared and guided reading and writing. However, whereas the Literacy Strategy is based on a model of teaching that is 'discursive, interactive, well-paced, confident, ambitious' (DfEE, 1998) with the teacher scaffolding learning and planned development from dependent to independent readers and writers, many teachers have done no more than change the format of their lessons.

Sample

Ten schools were selected from rural schools within a predominately rural county. Within each school a Key Stage 1 (age 5-7) and Key Stage 2 (age 7-11) class were identified (n =20) all of whom had a mixed aged intake. These schools were identified as already having reasonable levels of literacy teaching and attainment in that the school scores on previous national English tests were in the range 65 –75 % of pupils scoring the expected standard for their age. Local authority advisory staff confirmed that these were schools that gave them no particular cause for concern in literacy and that they regarded these schools as 'average' schools. None of the schools involved in the study therefore were any of those identified as needing to receive extra help from literacy consultants. They made their own best sense of the training materials they received and the practices they were asked to introduce.

Data collection

- *Semi-structured interviews*

  Teachers took part in audio-taped interviews, concerning their literacy practices at the beginning and end of the first year. These have been transcribed and analysed for common themes.

- *'Teachers Beliefs about Literacy' Questionnaire*

  All the teachers undertook a 'Teachers' Beliefs about Literacy' questionnaire (Westwood et al, 1997) at the beginning of the first year. Respondents reacted to a series of statements about literacy and literacy teaching and the scoring gave

teachers a numerical rating on a scale of 24-120 which indicates a continuum from a 'bottom-up', skills based approach to a 'top-down', child centred approach to literacy teaching. Teachers also assessed themselves on a seven point scale from most direct teaching to least direct teaching.

- *Standardised reading tests.*

  All pupils were tested at the beginning and end of the first year using standardised reading tests.

- *Classroom observations.*

  One literacy hour lesson per classroom was observed once a month throughout the school year, 1998-1999. This represents eight observations per classroom and 160 potential observations in total. The observation data includes details of the lesson focus; room layout and resources used; timed observations of the teacher at intervals during each section of the Literacy Hour and observations of target children in each of the four sections of the hour. At the end of each session the observer also wrote subjective field notes which gave an overview account of the whole lesson and notes on any brief discussion held after the lesson with the teacher.

- *Work samples*

  Written work samples from target children (one from each year group in the class) were collected on each visit, when possible.

- *Planning documents.*

  The teachers' long-term, medium and weekly or daily planning documents were requested and collected, if available.

- *Pupils' views.*

  On occasions, target pupils were asked their opinions of the lesson and the literacy hour.

- *Follow up study*

  One year later, twelve of the original teachers were revisited for one literacy hour, which was audiotaped as well as observed by the same research assistant. The teachers were given a short questionnaire and interviewed to ascertain their views twelve months on.

The data was collected as part of a project, which was particularly concerned to investigate the impact of the literacy hour in rural schools with mixed age classrooms. Whilst our data is from such schools, we would argue that many of the lessons from the classrooms we observed were not unique to this setting, and thus that our findings are applicable to other school contexts.

Findings

Each classroom was visited eight times at monthly intervals during the year, and one hour of literacy teaching was observed. Notes were recorded on an observation schedule that noted what the teacher was doing at seven predetermined points during the hour to coincide with the literacy hour structure. Of the 158 hours observed in the first year, 126 had each element of the whole class parts of the hour in place. Of the twenty classes, seven classes chose to do a complete literacy hour for every visit and a further five did so on seven of the eight visits (See table 2). This reflects what teachers reported to be their usual practice in the end of year interviews.

Use of shared work

Holdaway (1979) promoted the use of enlarged text which teachers and pupils read together. Since then there has been an explosion in the production of 'big books' of a range of genres, from picture books to information texts. Teachers have readily adopted these books and this aspect of the NLS has been well received. Perhaps less widely used but based upon similar principles of modelling the literacy process, is shared writing, in which teacher and pupils jointly construct a text, with the teacher acting as lead and scribe. Whereas teachers have readily lengthened their introduction to include 15 to 20 minutes of shared text work where teacher and pupils read the text aloud together and explore 'text level' objectives, the second portion where sentence or word level work is contextualised has been less popular.

Table 2: Observed use of the literacy hour in research classrooms

Pupils	Total No. observations	No. of whole sessions obse	No. of word/ sentence sessi observed	No. of guided sessions obse	No. of independent sessions obse	No. of plenary sessio observed
4–7 years Key Stage 1	80	78	71	79/160* 45 read 34 write	79	73
7-11 years Key Stage 2	78	78	70	40/78 25 read 15 write	78	72

** In 80 observed sessions with the younger children (Key Stage 1), 160 guided sessions could have been observed, as teachers of the younger children are expected to work with two guided groups in the 20 minute slot. 13 such 'double sessions' were observed in the 80 observations, and 53 'single sessions'.*

Use of guided work

One of the key features of the NLS is the importance given to teachers actually teaching for 100% of the time during the literacy hour. Although in interviews at the end of the year teachers said they had mainly used the literacy hour, our observations show variations from the normal pattern. These can be seen in Table 2. One of the key features of the literacy hour is the twenty minute slot where most of the class work independently and the teacher teaches reading or writing strategies to one small group for 20 minutes (Key Stage 2) or 2 small groups for 10 minutes each (Key Stage 1). This is the opportunity for teachers to work on particular areas for development with children of similar levels of attainment. The major difference between the literacy hours observed in the different classes was in this time. In eight of the classes the teacher working with small group(s) was observed to be in place on less than three occasions and in only seven of the classes was this observed on a regular basis. At Key Stage 2, only three teachers were observed to use the guided slot on a regular basis and two of these more usually undertook guided reading. Although only one literacy hour was observed each month, can be argued that if teachers were not using this

element of the hour when their literacy hours were under observation, it is unlikely that they would use it at other times. This judgement was also borne out by examination of teachers' weekly planning sheets.

Use of independent work

Guided work is one of the key features of the literacy hour, yet the major difference observed in the different classes was in this time. Those teachers who did not use the guided section for group teaching either worked with individual children or moved around the class overseeing the tasks set. They responded to perceived individual needs and answered children's questions. In addition to missing the opportunity to teach small groups, this resulted in the children in these classes being less able to work independently which made further attempts at guided work more difficult for the teacher. This way of managing teaching time is very similar to previous practice (see Bennet et al, 1984; Fisher, 1997)

Plenary

The plenary was found to be another element of the literacy hour that teachers found difficult. We speculated that this was largely due to their lack of understanding of a model of teaching that encourages the use of focused objectives. Many teachers used the plenary to celebrate individual achievement in a haphazard way rather than to focus on the successful use of the aspect of literacy that was being taught or to reinforce learning.

Features of practice

When the reading test results and writing samples were analysed, it was possible to identify some teachers whose pupils seemed to have made good progress. We then analysed the data further to identify which features of their practice might have contributed to the progress children made. These can be examined further in Lewis, Fisher and Davis (in preparation). In this paper I want to consider three of the features of practice that were observed our successful classrooms and that are key features of the NLS: use of objectives, shared and guided work, subject knowledge. I want to consider where these were indicated in the classrooms in our study and whether there was evidence of changes in teachers' practice as a result of the NLS. Although I will treat each of these separately, it can be seen that, in fact, each illustrate aspects of the other.

Use of objectives

The NLS provides teachers with a menu of objectives for each term, and teachers are encouraged to be explicit and focused in their use of objectives. Others have also identified this as a feature of effective teaching (Medwell et al, 1998; Mortimore et al, 1998; Ofsted, 1996). We found a range of approaches to the use of objectives from teachers who, despite having written objectives in their plans made very little overt reference to these; those who made objectives explicit but did not appear to teach these in a way that helped ensure children's understanding; to those whose way of introducing objectives and teaching them could be described as 'mindful' (Cambourne, 1999).

Let us consider three lessons where the obejctives have been identified by the teacher in their plans for the literacy hour.

Mrs Hargreaves, who teaches a class of children aged 8-11, used a range of imaginative texts with children and obviously loved literature and sharing texts with the class. As can be seen below, she had difficulty changing her teaching to a model where the objectives are made explicit. The observer wrote,

> *At the end of the lesson T. says they will play a game, i.e. if children can answer a question they can go off to get changed ofr PE. Questions phrased like: I'm thinking of something that is under the sink. I thought there had been no plenary and this was just a bit of fun. However, I found reference to it on the plan as a reinforcement for prepositions. I think the purpose and nay benefits from this exercise were lost as the T. didn't announce her intentions nor did she or the children pick out the prepositions.*
> (Hawthorne (ages 8-11), field notes, 26.2.99).

In contrast, Mrs Stephens identifies the learning objective, but due mainly to a poor relationship with the class is unable to teach effectively to more than a few children in the class.

> *Teacher says they will review the verb 'to be'. Teacher asks children for the present tense. The class is a bit noisy, not focused. Children seem a bit lost,*

throw up a lot of wrong answers. Teacher says 'to be' is the root from. Children begin to contribute correct answers which the teacher organises on the board.

Future	*Present*		*Past*
I will be	*I am*	*We are*	*I was*
	You are	*You are*	
	He is	*They are*	
I will go	*I go*		*I went*
I will walk	*I walk*		*I walked*

Teacher prompts answers with: today I ……, tomorrow I ……, yesterday I …… Having outlined the verbs, teacher asks children to identify the use of the root or not. It takes a few minutes, but a couple of girls get it, a lot of other children appear not to, however, teacher refers to regular and irregular verbs – transfers this idea to maths and then back again. It seems a bit vague and children don't seem to understand. (Sycamore (ages 9-11), field notes, 5.7.99)

In the following lesson Mrs Young at Yew Primary School does shared reading with a class of 5-7 year olds, looking at settings in story. Here the text is well known and at an appropriate level for the children. Mrs Young keeps her objective in mind and focuses children's attention through questioning and visual aids.

11.04 T has reviewed the story of Hansel and Gretel. Ch and T read the passage from Hansel and Gretel aloud. Ch read as they are able. T asks for words and phrases that tell you where it takes place, e.g. in the forest – highlights passage. T draws a picture map on the flip chart to show where the children went on day 1 and day 2. Ch remember what happens in the story. T refers to book.

11.11 Continue to read the passage – ch and T read aloud. …… T cont to draw story map and traces the ch journey with ch help. T asks what's happened at the end of the story. T prompts for the details. T reminds ch of different places in the story. Ch attentive, spontaneous responses. (Observation 9.3.99)

Thus, it appears, that teachers may be given a framework to work from, but if they do not either understand or subscribe to that model of teaching there is no guarantee that the practice will be effective. There is no intention here to be overly critical of teachers about this. In the interviews at the end of the first year of implementation many teachers expressed concern about the nature of the teaching they were employing. One spoke of feeling the children were on a *'whistle stop tour' with them needing more time and support'* (KS1 teacher at Beech), another complained of seeming to only *'scratch the surface'* (KS1 teacher at Cedar). Both of these teachers had mixed success with the literacy hour. Two other teachers who taught children of the same age had children who made good progress in the literacy hour and liked the framework of objectives. One said that she felt her teaching had changed as before *she 'sort of knew intuitively what I was doing rather than thinking about it in more detail'* (KS1 teacher at Hawthorne). Another said that she had learned to *'simplify things by having less objectives each week so you can really work at something'* (KS1 teacher at Chestnut).

An example from a literacy hour observed after two years of implementation shows how teachers, although teaching a literacy hour in terms of the time division of the lesson, have still not changed their practice in any fundamental way. The approach to the teaching of literacy in the eighties and nineties often involved the teacher providing a stimulus about which children would then talk, or read, or write while the teacher would draw out any teaching opportunities that would occur. The NLS expects teachers to select one or two pre-specified objectives that will be taught using a text that has been chosen for its suitability for the purpose. In the lesson observed here, the teacher was addressing a text level objective '*to discuss meanings of words and phrases that create humour, and sound effects in poetry, e.g. nonsense poems, tongue twisters ....*' (DfEE, 1998 Year 2Term3 Text 8) The lesson started with the teacher showing a large picture of a sandwich, she discussed with children what was in the sandwich in the picture and what sort of sandwiches they enjoyed. In this she was perfectly justifiably linking the 'text' with children's own experiences. Children joined in enthusiastically sharing their likes and dislikes of sandwiches. When the teacher then introduced a tongue twister about a sandwich, they were engaged and interested in the contents of the sandwich rather than the words the poet used to gain effect. The observer wrote, ... *however, what actually happened was they heard several tongue twisters, joined in a bit and talked about the definition of a tongue twister. The teacher announced they were doing tongue twisters today but she*

didn't say what they were doing with them or why they were doing them or what they were meant to be learning from the lesson. (Maple (ages 4-7), follow up visit June 2000, field notes). Had this teacher linked more successfully her knowledge of gaining children's interest with an understanding of the language objective of the lesson, more children may have gained an understanding of language than was evident in the observed lesson.

Shared and guided work

Shared reading gives children the chance to 'read' texts that they would not normally be able to read independently. The teacher, as the expert, reads a text that is beyond most children's ability to read independently. Either by supplying the more difficult words, sustaining interest by use of intonation or enhancing comprehension through careful questioning, the teacher leads the less experienced reader into the world of texts at a level in advance of what they could do on their own. It was clear from the end of year interviews that most teachers and children enjoyed this aspect of the literacy hour but only some teachers seemed to have understood how shared reading fitted into the pattern of teaching in the NLS. Those who did understand referred to the advantage of less able children being able to access a wider range of texts; how it gives all children a chance to say (as opposed to write) their ideas; and how the teacher can boost children's confidence through targeted questioning. Other teachers mentioned the enjoyment and aspects of the procedure (such as covering up words with post-it notes) or expressed concerns about less able children being left behind.

In the guided reading session, the teacher works with a group of children on a text of which they can read about 80% on their own. The teacher guides children by providing some of the more unusual words in the text or directing them to identify and main theme of the text or key strategies that will help them understand. The idea being that this time is for children to be helped to gain independence as readers. Children should also have other opportunities to read independently. In the past, the practice has been for teachers or other adults to listen to children read aloud from a text one at a time. This could be a useful opportunity for assessment or a time to get to know a child as an individual, however, it was not often the occasion for any teaching of reading and was very time consuming in a large class. A literacy hour observed recently during the follow-up project two years after the introduction of the literacy hour showed a teacher still not understanding the different functions of the two parts of the hour. In the first quarter of an hour, she had an enlarged

text of a poem; one at a time children came to the front of the class and read sentences out aloud. It was difficult to see what the purpose of this was beyond either a test situation for those who found it difficult or a celebration for those good readers who managed without difficulty. Later, a small group each had a copy of a simple reading book, which they read aloud in unison with the teacher. The observer's field notes back up the impression given by the audio-tape of the shared reading session,

> *She has chosen a text she likes and she knows will appeal to the children. She gives a lot of attention to interpreting the text for the children and quizzing their understanding of the story as well as vocabulary. Her interest and involvement are obvious but I'm not sure whether her style of delivery engages the children. It's difficult to tell when what's expected is reading from the screen and answering specific questions. A few children seemed not to be able to comply with this as they were looking in the opposite direction or were whispering, playing with their feet, had heads on table.* (KS2 teacher Maple, follow up visit June 2000, field notes).

Subject knowledge

An aspect of the NLS that teachers have expressed pleasure with is the framework of objectives (Fisher and Lewis, 1999). This provides them with a scheme of work that covers a great deal more aspects of literacy than what most teachers would have used in the past. Indeed, a questionnaire completed by another group of teachers after two years of teaching the NLS identified the framework of objectives as having clarified a whole range of aspects of literacy teaching that they had not previously considered (Fisher, in preparation).

Yet again, here we have an area that is open to a wide range of interpretations dependent on teachers' views of literacy and views of teaching. I want to compare two literacy hours in two different classrooms in which aspects of knowledge about language are being taught. The first lesson took place in November 1998, Mrs York at Yew Tree Primary school was working with a year 5/6 class. As part of work on recount, she was looking at how a newspaper report is put together focusing on an enlarged version of an article from a newspaper on the use of fluoride. This was followed by sentence level work on the past tense. The observation schedule reads as follows:

9.19 Introducing article on fluoride, reads to ch. Using finger/pts out para/ reads again/ checks for comprehension/reads 2nd para again using finger/asks comp. ques. Asks ch's opinions ch. respond with hands up. 9.29 'think who might disagree and why' to come back later in the week. Explains tasks at tables. Ch. > tables (newspaper art. on tables in pairs) read through tog. Look for verbs in the past/reminds them of prev. work on past tense and writes examples on white board. Demonstrates how to make stop > stopped, drop > dropped. Reminds them of carry > carried. T asks ch. to try to find others in art. Everyone seems to be involved.
(Observation 3/11/98)

Here the teaching of verb tenses arises from the text read earlier in the literacy hour. The aspect of grammar studied, the past tense, was of relevance to the type of text – a recount usually requires use of the past tense. The teaching session is focused and clearly explained.

In contrast, Mrs Parker at Pine Primary School in May 1999 taught the past tense to a class of children of the same age. She was focusing on instructional texts, considering their purposes, organisation and layout. This was followed by work on changing verb endings to form the past tense. The observation schedule reads as follows.

10.54 T using big book to review instructions, making a wallet book. Turns to page on Making an Origami envelope. T asks ch. what origami is and where it comes from. Asks ch what (are) features of good instructions e.g. pictures, clear writing. T and ch read instructions aloud tog. Stop to check to see if they are clear. T asks if there are any difficult points – ch bring up confusion about horizontally. T draws attention to the layout of pictures and writing on the page. Cont. reading instructions on next page.
11.01 T goes back to beginning of instructions. T asks what a verb is. Ch say 'doing word'. T asks for verbs from text and writes them on white board e.g. pull, fold, lay, mark, turn, put, make. T says these instructions are written as if you are making it now – present tense – about now. T prompts for what's going to happen – future. T prompts for what's happened – past. Says need to alter words to make past tense e.g.

pull>pulled, fold>folded, lay>laid, mark>marked, turn>turned, put>put, make>made. T generalises that often use 'ed' for past tense. Not put in context of sentences. (Observation 26.5.99)

Here, as in the previous example the work on verbs is based on the text that had been read earlier. However, in this case, the link is not as useful. In the instructional text the verb is in the imperative and, as such, is not inflected. The emphasis is on form not usage. Although the focus is on tenses, the introduction of the future tense may not have been useful here.

Discussion

Although the examples given above are single incidents, they are chosen from many similar to act as exemplars to illustrate what appears to be happening in some classrooms. When looking at individual lessons we can only really judge from the children's response in that lesson. However, our data from reading test results and work samples have led us to believe that the teachers whose lessons are cited above as examples of effective literacy hours, were also effective teachers in terms of children's progress in literacy over the first year of implementation of the literacy strategy.

The three features I have chosen to consider above should not be considered in isolation from each other. They seem to point to the importance of the teacher having a clear vision for their teaching. Most effective lessons (in terms of children's engagement) were those in which the teacher kept her purpose in mind both in terms of what was being taught and the pedagogy associated with this. Most of the teachers in our study had happy classes of well-motivated children; they had good relationships with their class; they tried conscientiously to follow the guidelines of the NLS. Lessons in which children appeared confused or lacked engagement with the learning were those where the teacher engaged children's attention by stimulating enjoyment (as in the guessing game) or interest in the content of the text (as with the sandwich) but did not provide a clear lead as to the aspect of literacy to be examined. It can also be argued that learning was less effective when the pedagogy was confused: where the demands teachers placed on the children required them to display knowledge rather than explore it as in reading aloud to the class (as in the example above) or where teachers' use of questioning required no more than literal answers. It also seemed to be more difficult for children to gain a good understanding of

aspects of literacy when the teachers themselves had a confused understanding. We have examples of instances where teachers have tried to explain certain features of grammar without any clear grasp themselves. Most often these instances arose from the teachers' attempts to oversimplify a complex point by dictating rules rather than exploring usage.

None of these findings are new. The features discussed above relate to the teachers' knowledge of their subject – literacy as a subject and pedagogy as a subject. There have been criticisms levelled at the NLS that the view of literacy and teaching presented is one of the teacher as technician (Thring, 1999). It can appear that teaching is seen as a simple matter of providing teachers with a menu of content (the Framework of Objectives) and a simple procedure for delivering the objectives (the literacy hour). Our research demonstrates that there is more to teaching than this. Although the NLS is underpinned by sound educational principles, these have not been made clearly explicit in either the initial documentation or the training materials. Early training videos emphasised the organisational aspects of the literacy hour and the importance of the timed sections was stressed. Thus, as teachers have begun to gain confidence with the hour and to make it their own, it is often these features that they alter. We found teachers to leave out the plenary as there was no time (yet this is where objectives can be reiterated and success celebrated); to hear children read individually as they could hear them all at the same time (yet this is where children are taught to become independent); to avoid teaching groups so they could supervise children as they worked (yet this again is where children can develop independence).

It is argued that whereas governments may be able to dictate the content of the literacy curriculum, it is not a simple matter to change the way teachers teach, teaching is a more complex process taking into account a range of issues including teachers' beliefs about how children learn and about what counts in literacy. Early indications from this research show that teachers may change their surface behaviour but that their underlying beliefs and how they interact with children is much slower to change.

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